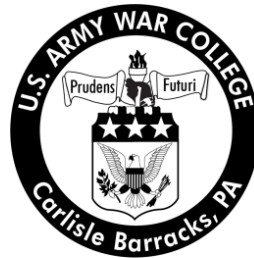


# Strategy Research Project

## Combatant Commander Challenges and the Role of Religion and History

by

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United States Army War College  
Class of 2013

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
<p>The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. <b>PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</b></p>					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) xx-03-2013		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Combatant Commander Challenges and the Role of Religion and History				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Commander Richard B. Thomas United States Navy				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Dr. Christian Keller Department of National Security and Strategy				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 8,564					
14. ABSTRACT <p>The challenges posed to the Commandant Commander (CCDR) in conducting operations can be captured in a thorough understanding of Joint Publication 5-0, which provides a checklist of inputs to the design, but is wanting on two key issues. First, the doctrine glosses over the significance of history by simply adding the adjective of "relevant" before the term "history". The correct and useful application of historical knowledge by any military leader, but especially a CCDR, requires a deeper analysis and recognition that is currently lacking in official joint doctrine. Second, the role of religion as a specific cultural characteristic that must be understood—especially in an age of combating Muslim extremists—is conspicuously absent. This omission is extraordinarily shortsighted, and, when combined with the short shrift given to the value of history in the doctrine that our operational and strategic leaders must follow, may lead to gross miscalculations that at best are financially unacceptable and at worst could lead to strategic disaster.</p>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS CCDR, Mali, Civil War					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT  UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES  38	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)



USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Report Date: March 2013

Page Count: 38

Word Count: 8,564

Key Terms: CCCR, Mali, Civil War

Classification: Unclassified

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## **Combatant Commander Challenges and the Role of Religion and History**

The Department of Defense can no longer count on bottomless coffers of appropriations from Congress. In the wake of the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the military and the defense industrial complex received a figurative blank check to exact justice on the affiliates of al Qaeda and the states that harbored violent Muslim extremists around the world. The American people united against this asymmetric adversary. The Department of Defense budget grew exponentially, with overages funded through separate accounting initially termed Cost of War (COW), and later converted to Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) to fund the Global War on Terror (GWOT). America's strategic leadership made little distinction between the violent Muslim extremists and the nation states that harbored them. Under President Bush's administration, the armed forces mobilized, deployed, and defeated both the Taliban and al Qaeda, but remain embroiled in the GWOT (now officially termed the War Against Violent Muslim Extremists), with troops still on the ground in Afghanistan, billions in aid streaming to Iraq, and looming threats to be dealt with in Africa. The days of unconstrained budgets in pursuit of the extremists have now given way to the blooming fiscal crisis of sequestration, debt ceiling, and Congressional tax debates. It is in this new austere budget environment, characterized by a polarized Legislative Branch, that the strategic leadership of the United States must prioritize capabilities against symmetric and asymmetric threats.

The challenges and opportunities posed to the Commandant Commander (CCDR) in conducting operations in a joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational operating environment can be captured in a thorough understanding of Joint Publication 5-0 "Joint Operation Planning", which provides a checklist of inputs to

the operational environment, but is wanting on two key issues.<sup>1</sup> First, the doctrine glosses over the significance of history by simply adding the adjective of “relevant” before the term “history”. The correct and useful application of historical knowledge by any military leader, but especially a CCDR, requires a deeper analysis and recognition that is currently lacking in official joint doctrine. Second, the role of religion as a specific cultural characteristic that must be understood—especially in an age of combating Muslim extremists—is conspicuously absent. This omission is extraordinarily shortsighted, and, when combined with the short shrift given to the value of history in the doctrine that our operational and strategic leaders must follow, may lead to gross miscalculations that at best are financially unacceptable and at worst could lead to strategic disaster.

Despite the doctrine’s shortcomings, most current CCDRs and their staffs do attempt to study history in the little amount of spare time they are allocated. As they do so, however, they must guard against pitfalls such as using an analysis of history as a predictor for future decisions and blindly accepting written history as an irrefutable account of the past. According to Antulio J. Echevarria, Director of Research and National Security Affairs at the US Army War College, “The role that history should serve in professional military education is not that of a foundation for experiencing war vicariously, but as a way to develop higher-level critical thinking skills.”<sup>2</sup> More cynically, Napoleon is credited for saying, “What is history but a fable agreed upon?” This quote underscores the fact that history is written from the author’s perspective, including his biases and those of his culture at a particular point in time. For generations, professional historians have been in conflict over defining history’s place in critical

thinking and as a predictor for the future. The often-used phrase from the philosopher George Santayana, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,” is clichéd but still strikes at a basic truth.<sup>3</sup> The relevance of history as an integral part of understanding the operational environment is irrefutable. History should be studied in the context of capturing applicable insights from the recorded past, but always with the understanding that these are necessarily tainted by the perspective and/or agenda of the author. Therefore, history must be adapted, critically analyzed, and thoughtfully applied to current operational and strategic realities. Before, during, and after American forces have been deployed, leaders must consistently and carefully utilize history as a way of analyzing whether the delicate ends-ways-means nexus is remaining in balance.

Religion is another major factor that needs to be added to the operational design process. Religion can be defined as people's beliefs and opinions concerning the existence, nature, and worship of a deity or deities, and divine involvement in the universe and human life.<sup>4</sup> These strongly held beliefs get at the core of what divides the various sects and tribal factions that CCDRs encounter in their Areas of Responsibility (AORs) today. Religion, in essence, creates the lines of demarcation not only for defining opposing, neutral, and friendly forces in the operational environment, but also stratifying the layers of complexity within the opposing, neutral, and friendly groups. A thorough assessment of the stakeholders of the complex layers in this environment must be achieved prior to committing “Boots on the Ground” (BOG). Once the President commits Americans to BOG, the troops alter the operational environment both physically by their occupation of foreign land and mentally by their effect on the attitudes of the stakeholders. Obviously, these attitudes matter strategically, for they belong to

the stakeholders the operational and tactical military leaders will partner with to solve—or manage-- the greater Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) problem.<sup>5</sup>

From ancient times to the present, opposing sides in war have long evoked the favor of the deity to strengthen their resolve and to justify their actions. In the United States, religion has played a prominent and distinct role in each of the country's wars. The era of the American Civil War and the War Against Violent Muslim Extremists, despite obvious contextual differences, offer modern CCDRs and their staffs a thoughtful historical comparison regarding the salience of religion in each. The country's bloodiest war and most protracted conflict, although separated by over 150 years, clearly demonstrate that religion and faith were instrumental in conflict causation, execution, and termination. Future strategic leaders, increasingly constrained by financial limitations, would do well to examine this historical comparative in order to more efficiently and expeditiously create strategies that utilize existing means to achieve designated ends.

### Roles of Religion

Regardless of the title or setting of the story, whether it is a children's novel or a work of modern fiction, the narrative of most modern popular publications is usually reduced to a struggle between good and evil in which good ultimately prevails. Many modern strategic leaders also follow this reductive model, using religion to simplify the various differences leading to armed conflict by characterizing the current war as the age-old battle of good versus evil. This is a primary role religion often plays in war. Given it is a battle between good and evil, then God "clearly" must be on "our side" and we must seek the favor of God to ensure America is victorious. America's leaders have

traditionally called upon the country's Judeo-Christian religious beliefs to justify going to war and killing the enemy, and current international institutions such as the United Nations have inculcated much of the same cultural heritage in delineating where and when and how to intervene in a given region or country. Although not all nations and cultures adhere to these same standards, this "Just War tradition" has a long history.<sup>6</sup> In the days of the Cold War, for instance, it was the "godless" Soviet Union juxtaposed against the God-fearing and abiding United States.<sup>7</sup> President Dwight D. Eisenhower drew this distinction while clearly delivering it in speeches at the dawn of the Cold War and adding the words "In God we trust" to the pledge of allegiance.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, religion and faith have frequently been used by national authorities to ease the loss of friendly life through euphemisms; "he made the ultimate sacrifice" and "he transitioned to a better place" are two long-standing phrases delivered to mourning widows and family that allude to a peaceful afterlife in heaven with God.<sup>9</sup>

The use of religion in the first years of GWOT was reminiscent of the rhetoric leading up to the Civil War. In the 1840s, Free Soil and later Republican leaders rallied the northern people behind the ideals of "free labor, free soil, and free men" in a republic they deemed uniquely blessed by God against devilish southern fire-eaters who threatened to dissolve the divine American experiment by secession.<sup>10</sup> In the early 2000s, a different Republican Party likewise rallied the American people to do battle against an enemy in the shadows. Facing a foreign, non-Christian enemy who attacked in the name of a non-Judeo-Christian god, the Commander-in-Chief led by seeking the blessing of his God.<sup>11</sup> In the first State of the Union address following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush evoked the favor of God:

"Freedom and fear are at war ... Freedom and Fear, Justice and Cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. ... In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom and may he watch over the United States of America."<sup>12</sup> According to their statements made on a PBS Frontline documentary episode, Mark Danner of *The New Yorker* and Karen De Young of *The Washington Post* both wrote articles about the address proclaiming a new strategic doctrine, The Bush Doctrine.<sup>13</sup> The Bush Doctrine leaves no room for ambiguity on the battle lines; it is a clear "us versus them" or good versus evil divide. The attacks of September 11, 2001 left no questions for Americans on the justification for the war on terror. Yet David Fisher and Brian Wicker, editors of a book of essays written by both Christian and Muslim authors, state that just war principles, though based on Judeo-Christian thinking, have a universal appeal. "The slaughter of innocents is as roundly condemned in mainstream Islamic teaching as it is in mainstream Christian thought, as well as in enlightened secular thinking."<sup>14</sup> This argumentation, nuanced as it is in both cultural and historical literacy, serves as a beacon of reason in an age when religion is all too often manipulated by policy-makers to justify the ends in war.<sup>15</sup>

Army Chaplain, Colonel Jonathan E. Shaw, examines how modern policy-makers have viewed and applied religion in national security policy in his paper, "The Role of Religion in National Security Policy Since September 11, 2001". Shaw asserts that President Bush held religious freedom as the litmus test for a free society. He codifies President Bush's framework as "Religion as Freedom". The assumption that all peoples crave religious freedom greatly contributed to the Bush Administration's false assumption that American troops would be welcomed with open arms in Baghdad.

Conversely, Shaw argues that President Barack Obama's worldview is the more universal "Religion as Unity" framework, which is rooted in the "Golden Rule" shared by all major religions. The author writes, "Based on this assumption, President Obama has labeled radical Muslims terrorists as false Muslims, and also launched initiatives to honor Islam and resolve mutual misunderstandings through dialog with Muslim states."<sup>16</sup> In recent years, it is clear American commanders in chief have utilized religion to create and elicit support for their policies. They were not the first strategic leaders to do so, however.

### A House Divided

Many historians studying the era of the American Civil War have asserted that disagreements about slavery, often framed in religious terms, started the North and the South on the road to conflict long before the guns opened up on Fort Sumter in April 1861. Failure to reach a compromise on this most divisive issue--left unaddressed in the Constitution by the Founders—created the tinder that allowed the flames of war to ignite, and, once ignited, offered leaders on both sides ample opportunities to invoke the blessings of God upon their cause and wrath upon the other. Both Union and Confederate temporal and religious leaders used the divisive issue of slavery—the root cause of the war—as a means and a way of edging closer to the ends of military victory.<sup>17</sup> Today and yesterday, religion creates the deepest uncompromising divides between two opposing sides because it changes the dynamic of the argument by escalating the plane from a terrestrial to a celestial one. One can disagree with another person presenting his position based largely on personal opinion or fact, but who among men can effectively argue with Almighty God? The American revolutionaries, grandfathers of the soldiers who fought the Civil War, rebelled against a King who was

the head of the church as well as the state, thus setting the precedent of the United States being founded at least partially on the grounds of religious freedom. According to Margaret Washington, Historian at Cornell University, “It was a covenant, an agreement between the people and God. They were a new Israel, a chosen people, and they had a responsibility to live up to God’s covenant.”<sup>18</sup> The problem during the sectional crisis and ensuing war was that both northerners and southerners believed they were honoring their commitment to God’s covenant. John Blake, reporter for *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, interviewed David Chesebrough, editor of “God Ordained This War: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865” for a story. Chesebrough stated, “As you read letters and the diaries of soldiers and officers alike, they’re always talking about God. Each side is convinced that God is on their side.”<sup>19</sup> Lending credence to the assertion that invoking the deity changes the plane of the argument, he continued, “I would go so far as to say that if the clergy on both sides had not become involved, the North and the South might have found a different way to settle their differences. You begin to put forth the idea that your cause is right and it’s what God wants, [and] there’s almost no turning back.”<sup>20</sup>

William Lloyd Garrison was clearly one of those people who believed he was doing what God wanted. He is widely recognized today as the leader of the prewar Abolitionist movement, publishing *The Liberator* newspaper in Boston, Massachusetts through the decades preceding the outbreak of hostilities.<sup>21</sup> The newspaper gave voice to many of the sermons being preached in churches across the North at the time, especially in New England: slavery was both sinful and criminal and an abomination before God. In 1837, John Brown, like Garrison a leader of strategic importance, was



inspired by a similar sermon while attending church in Ohio.<sup>22</sup> Brown was so moved that he pledged his life to the abolition of slavery believing that he was called by God to abolish the institution, and he was not alone in this conviction.<sup>23</sup> On 16 October 1859, Brown led 5 blacks and 13 whites into Harpers Ferry, Virginia, bent on seizing the Federal arsenal there and distributing the captured guns to escaping southern slaves, who would then begin a massive slave insurrection all throughout the slaveholding South.<sup>24</sup> The plan, although ill-thought out and ending in failure, had immense strategic impact, precisely what Brown wanted. According to historian Ed Bearss, "... [Brown] becomes the single most important factor in my opinion for bringing on the war."<sup>25</sup> In an ironic twist of fate, Col Robert E. Lee led the Federal troops into Harpers Ferry to put down the stillborn rebellion, foreshadowing the greater armed conflict that was to come. John Brown was convicted for treason against the state of Virginia after a speedy trial, and subsequently hanged at the gallows.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the failure of John Brown's rebellion, his actions galvanized the positions and enthusiasm of citizens in both the North and the South. A huge crowd of Southerners traveled to watch John Brown's execution, including two men who would play pivotal roles in the coming years: Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and John Wilkes Booth.<sup>27</sup> Many northerners, previously apathetic to the plight of southern slaves or annoyed by abolitionist rhetoric, were suddenly jolted into cognizance of the great divide that now existed between their section and the states south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Some, such as abolitionist Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave who spoke so eloquently at abolitionist meetings that many charged there was no way he could have ever been a slave, argued that the time had finally come to strike a blow in the name of

God against slavery and for universal freedom. Douglass reflected on John Brown's actions: "His zeal in the cause of my race was far greater than mine - it was as the burning sun to my taper light - mine was bounded by time, his stretched away to the boundless shores of eternity. I could live for the slave, but he could die for him."<sup>28</sup>

Douglass, a man who later would himself become a strategic leader for the Union during and after the Civil War, recognized that the slain Brown had created a messianic-strategic vision and followed through with it. Brown knew the likelihood of tactical failure but was well aware that his actions would serve a strategic, even a grand strategic purpose: awakening the people of the North to the plight of the southern slave in a very real sense, and infusing many of them with a religious fervor to free them.<sup>29</sup> While John Brown fought through action and deeds and Fredrick Douglass fought through brilliant oratory and books, the publication and widespread acclaim of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* published in the spring of 1852, served to galvanize anti-slavery sentiments among common Yankees not previously influenced by the Abolitionist movement. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provided northern readers with a portal deep into the heart of Dixie to the most egregious practice of slavery, that of ripping children from the hands of mothers and fathers.<sup>30</sup> Historian James McPherson claims the publishers could not keep pace with demand for Stowe's extraordinary book: "Within a year it sold three hundred thousand copies in the United States alone—comparable to at least three million today.... Within a decade it had sold more than two million copies in the United States, making it the best seller of all time in proportion to population."<sup>31</sup>

During the Civil War itself, strategic leaders and theater commanders frequently utilized faith—both personal and public-- as a means toward attaining their ends. For

instance, Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson’s overt obedience to God and almost crusader-like devotion to the southern cause became legendary during 1862 and 1863. According to historian William C. Davis, Jackson’s successive victories on the battlefield against usually superior Union forces fed the legend and enhanced his reputation, well beyond the striking power his forces actually possessed. In fact, his lore grew so much that his reputation preceded him; Union troops would quiver at the knowledge they were facing Stonewall Jackson, thereby enhancing the military power he was able to wield. From beginning to end, despite unquestionable leadership qualities, the general attributed all of his success on the battlefield to God, and friend and foe both knew and respected him for it.<sup>32</sup> Historian Shelby Foote said of Stonewall, “he had this strange combination of religious fanaticism and glory in battle ... He knew perfectly well that a reputation for victory in battle would grow and build.”<sup>33</sup> Stonewall Jackson strongly held that God ordained that America had to have a civil war, a conflict that would, he believed, strengthen both an independent Confederacy and a chastened Union: “he who does not see the hand of God in this is blind sir, blind,” he once told a colleague.<sup>34</sup>

General Robert E. Lee’s faith was instilled in him by his mother, but his military pedigree was begotten from his father, General Richard Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee. His father was a celebrated leader and subordinate of George Washington in the Revolutionary War.<sup>35</sup> According to historian Gary W. Gallagher, Lee lacked religious fervor early in his life.<sup>36</sup> Lee’s life was changed, however, during a period in which his favorite sister and mother-in-law both died. He looked for a higher power for comfort and direction, and thus began a relationship with God that he would continue to nurture

during the war, first as personal strategic advisor to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, and later as commander of the famed Army of Northern Virginia—where his operational decisions influenced the course of the war and the national fate of the Confederacy.<sup>37</sup> Like Jackson, Lee's Christian faith was a known quantity among both his comrades and enemies, and some attributed his battlefield victories to unfair divine preference. Frederick Douglass once cynically claimed, "It would seem that the soldier who kills the most men in battle, even in a bad cause, is the greatest Christian and is entitled to the highest place in heaven."<sup>38</sup> How much did Lee's Christian faith assist him in making key operational and strategic decisions throughout the war? This is a difficult question to answer with the available primary source evidence, but it is clear from Douglass' comment, among others, that Lee's Christianity was a factor in his wartime reputation, and therefore influenced how others viewed him then, and still revere him today. Unquestionably, religion influenced this key leader of the Civil War.<sup>39</sup>

President Abraham Lincoln stands above all other presidents of the United States, save George Washington, for fighting to save and ultimately reuniting the Union. Despite never serving in the military, he demonstrated more resolve to win the war than his first generals chosen to command the Union Army.<sup>40</sup> Initially, upon his election, President Lincoln was willing to agree to a compromise to permit slavery where it existed if it would prevent secession. After the Confederate States seceded and demonstrated tenacity on the battlefield, bolstered by the belief God was on their side, Lincoln began to believe that a means to the end of defeating the rebellion included the emancipation of the Confederacy's slaves. This evolution in Lincoln's thought, deeply rooted in his prewar political philosophy, also exhibited an undeniable influence from a

strong Christian faith. Over the years, champions and critics have debated whether Lincoln's transformation was born of faith or political opportunity, but no historian has studied this question and the later interpretations more thoroughly than Pulitzer Prize-winning Historian Allen C. Guelzo. "And yet what is remarkable is that Lincoln was only dubious about the various legal mechanisms of emancipation, not emancipation itself. The trope required to fully understand emancipation is neither progress nor waiting, but prudence."<sup>41</sup>

Lincoln's relationship with God is one of some debate, but it is clear that it transformed into a more personal and meaningful one after the death of his beloved son Willie in early 1862: some historians speculate that this event served as a catalyst for prompting Lincoln to move irrevocably toward freeing the slaves. According to historian William Klingaman, the President received audiences from both sides of the slavery divide as he contemplated emancipation, with many of them proclaiming God was on their side. Lincoln stated, "I can assure you that the subject is on my mind, by day and by night, more than any other. Whatever shall appear to be God's will I will do."<sup>42</sup> Lincoln required a significant Union victory to back up the power of the Emancipation Proclamation, however, and that "victory" came at Antietam in September 1862 when Lee's first invasion of the North was turned back. After issuing the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in October, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation into law effective January 1, 1863, which was a strategic victory diplomatically and militarily for the Union: England and France backed away from recognizing southern independence and suddenly the door opened for hundreds of thousands of black recruits for the Federal army and navy. Moreover, the Proclamation sent a strategic

message to both the Union and the Confederacy that changed the nature of the Civil War; now the war was both about ending slavery and preserving the Union.<sup>43</sup>

Economically, the Proclamation also hurt the Confederacy as thousands of southern slaves ran away to freedom as the northern armies marched deeper into the South. As a document, however, the Emancipation Proclamation portrays Lincoln's transformation from a worshipper of an impersonal grand architect of the universe to a leader who recognized a personally-engaging God.

As the war progressed, Lincoln's religious faith grew deeper and became more entwined with his two strategic goals. Pulitzer Prize-winning historian James McPherson aptly describes the scene of President Lincoln walking through the streets of Richmond on April 4, 1865, just days after the Confederate capital fell to Union forces, spelling the end of southern independence. "Overwhelmed by rare emotions, Lincoln said to one black man who fell on his knees in front of him: 'Don't kneel to me. That is not right. You must kneel to God only, and thank Him for the liberty you will enjoy hereafter.'"<sup>44</sup> Lincoln distinguished himself from the other strategic leaders of the Civil War by believing that ultimately both sides were being punished for the dreadful sin of slavery. In his eloquent Second Inaugural Address he said, "Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has his own purposes."<sup>45</sup> No greater affirmation of the Union commander in chief's religious faith exists; when he ended the address by appealing to all

Americans, North and South, to act according to the “better angels of [their] nature,” he expressed hope for the future in terms all Christians could understand. What better way to strategically communicate a vision for conflict termination? Ultimately Lincoln believed that the Civil War’s price in blood, emotion, and treasure was God’s judgment on an erring nation for the dreadful sin of slavery, but was fully justified by the Union’s strategic triumph.<sup>46</sup>

### Modern Challenges

Dr. Mark Noll, professor of Christian thought at Wheaton College, notes a parallel between the American Civil War and the modern campaign against violent Muslim extremists regarding the willingness to fight and endure suffering when a combatant is motivated by the belief that God is on their side. "During the Civil War, people thought that God would vindicate the right side, which kept them fighting longer.... Muslims blowing themselves up in Iraq is an extreme instance of the same thing. If you think people are against God, you are willing to put more into the struggle." How religion was utilized by strategic leaders in the 1860s is therefore instructive for strategic leaders, especially Combatant Commanders, in today’s world. How well they are prepared—through sound doctrine—to best maximize the value of this and other historical knowledge is, however, open to question.<sup>47</sup>

According to Joint Operation Planning, the Combatant Commander (CCDR) shall use his experience, intellect, creativity, intuition, education, and judgment to guide his staff through the operational art phase of garnering an understanding of the environment. A pitfall for the commander and his staff to avoid is to allow personal bias and heuristics to project on the environment rather than to objectively observe and accurately sense the environment. After understanding the problem as part of

operational design, the CCDR can develop the commander's intent, balancing ends, ways, and means at an acceptable level of risk. A clearly communicated intent that was developed through a collaborative process with seniors and subordinates builds trust and raises the chances for success in a given theater.<sup>48</sup> Since the CCDR's level of understanding of the operational environment shapes the operational approach, getting the process right is crucial and directly related to mission success. During several Theater Strategy Campaigning (TSC) lectures at the U.S. Army War College, Professor Jeffrey Groh recounted that Albert Einstein stated he would take 59 minutes thinking about the problem and only one minute figuring out the solution. Albert Einstein's methodology for dealing with the world's problems underscores the importance of understanding the operational environment in an analytical and comprehensive manner.<sup>49</sup>

As per Joint Operation Planning, the CCDR's methodology must use three distinct aspects in the development of an operational approach. First, the CCDR shall understand the strategic direction and the military objectives required to achieve them. The strategic guidance provided by the President and National Security Council (NSC) informs the CCDR's strategic direction. Second, the CCDR shall understand the operational environment that constitutes all the conditions, circumstances, and influences that define the macro context of the problem. This analysis must account for the inputs of relevant history, physical and information factors, and PMESII (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, and Infrastructure) analysis for the opposing, neutral and friendly actors. Third, the CCDR shall define the problem by understanding and isolating the root causes of the conflict. "Together they constitute an organizational



learning methodology that corresponds to three basic questions that must be answered to produce an actionable operational approach to guide detailed planning.”<sup>50</sup> A review of the above methodology through the lens of the CCDR formulating an operational strategy today makes it easy to understand why Albert Einstein spent 59 minutes thinking about the problem. On the other hand, the Joint Operation Planning publication does not spill any real ink addressing the challenges and opportunities posed to the CCDR by developing an understanding of the religion and history of a given region.

Critics might counter that history and religion are outside of the purview of not only the CCDR, but also inconsequential to the armed forces of the United States to project power in the nation’s interest. Although a deep knowledge of the adversary’s religion and history may have been less significant prior to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the extremist enemies we are facing now and will face in the future are well-rooted in their religious beliefs and history. How they perceive their place in the world is inextricably linked to perceived historical injustices (such as Western imperialism) and religious imperatives derived from holy texts. Knowing this background is extremely important to the modern American strategist, and especially the CCDR. Admittedly, religion and history are challenging to codify in Joint Doctrine, but the task is far from impossible. A change in policy, practice and doctrine is required.

The U.S. Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, recognizes that the austere fiscal environment necessitates the nation should operate as a member of a multinational alliance or coalition with interagency and intergovernmental partners to act on a myriad of strategic threats. According to an article by Mark Weisgerber published in *Defense News*, Secretary Panetta called for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to

shift to a more relevant posture to react to the current threats vice the threat posed by the former Soviet- led Warsaw Pact.<sup>51</sup> Secretary Panetta said during a speech at Kings College, "Going forward, we also must broaden the scope of our alliance security discussions beyond European and regional issues. In particular, I strongly believe that Europe should join the United States in increasing and deepening defense engagement with the Asia-Pacific region."<sup>52</sup> Secretary Panetta sees military-to-military cooperation and partnership as a cost-effective way to answer threats in the physical and cyber domain.<sup>53</sup> The cost savings will materialize through unity of effort and shared capability. For example, Great Britain or France can use their forces or sources in one capability while the United States leverages its combat capability in another area.

The French- led and United States-supported action in the North African country of Mali is the most recent instance of the aforementioned shared capability and unity of effort. France was willing and able to deploy ground troops and air assets to project military power in their former colony at the request of the legitimate government. Violent Islamist and Tuareg insurgents, both al Qaeda affiliated, threatened to overrun the Mali capitol, Bamako.<sup>54</sup> Prepositioned helicopters and other equipment at bases within the region enabled the French forces rapid deployment in Mali, termed Operation Serval. The United States responded to France's request for C-17 transport planes and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) support. According to *Defense News*, other allies have agreed to provide assistance as well. "Countries including Britain, Belgium, Canada and Denmark have pledged transport planes to help France. Germany is not helping France directly but said it would send two C-160s to airlift

African troops from a planned 3,000 strong military mission to support the Malian government.”<sup>55</sup>

The Sahel region of Africa, which includes Mauritania, southern Algeria, northern Mali, Chad, Sudan and Somalia, remains at risk for the militant Muslim factions such as al-Qaida and al-Qaida sympathizers. Islam dominates the Northern portion of the continent just as Christianity is the predominant religion in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>56</sup> As author Ralph Peters noted, many Africans practice an amalgamation of traditional tribal religious practices in conjunction with Muslim or Christian practices.<sup>57</sup> The French-led and United States-backed armed conflict in Mali successfully prevented the establishment of a safe haven for violent Muslim extremists and avoided American BOG. Columnist Eliza Griswold accurately captured the irregular allegiances within the region, however, that could have created the conditions for an Afghanistan-like, drawn-out counterinsurgency fight: "Ethnic and religious allegiances are much more binding than those of national identity. Exploiting these ties - as well as the growing importance of a global Islamic identity - foreign fighters have decamped from the drone zone of Afghanistan and Pakistan to melt into the Lands of North Africa." Griswold lends credence to the need for a deeper understanding of the root causes of the regional problems, which are climatical, ethnic, and religious in origin and historically date back to well before the French colonial period. How well the American CDR and his staff evaluated Malian history and religion prior to planning and executing the American portion of the allied strategy is hard to determine based on unclassified sources at this time, but the rapid success of the operation is undisputable, indicating that perhaps they overcame in their planning the current lack of guidance on these issues in Joint

Operational doctrine. Much as the self-taught Abraham Lincoln evolved into a fine grand strategist while simultaneously deepening his faith during the American Civil War, U.S. leaders displayed adaptability and growth in Mali.<sup>58</sup>

Arguably, the unity of effort demonstrated in Mali will serve as a model for future multinational alliances or coalitions with interagency and intergovernmental responses to regional threats. During an interview with ABC's Martha Raddatz, Defense Secretary Panetta indicated "our willingness and ability to help other countries like France be able to go after AQIM (al Qaeda in the Maghreb). I think is the kind of model that you're going to see in the future."<sup>59</sup> The Mali model limits risk to loss of American lives and treasure while strengthening relationships with our partners and destroying our adversaries. Another benefit of this model is that it encourages other countries to become vested in the responsibility of preserving peace and stability. But implied in all of this is the increased significance of theater commanders truly understanding regional history and religion, two of the primary building blocks of human culture. Not only must they have a good grasp of the culture of the nation into which U.S. forces may be deployed, but also that of coalition partners, increasingly more of which will likely be non-Judeo-Christian in the future.<sup>60</sup>

Few Americans would argue that Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the Second Iraq War, did not evolve into a VUCA problem, but the opinions of the country's strategic leadership the day prior to the commencement of major combat operations was very simplistic and reflected what in retrospect could be called an ignorance of the Iraqi cultural context. That context was strongly influenced by history and religion, and there is little evidence in the available source material that enough consideration was given by

American strategists and policymakers alike to the unique cultural blend—with all of its ethnic, tribal, and sectarian nuances—that made up Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Tim Russert, then moderator of “Meet the Press”, questioned Vice President Dick Cheney on his perceptions on how America had changed since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and on the impending Iraq War.<sup>61</sup> Russert challenged Cheney’s assertion that the United States military would be greeted as liberators: “If your analysis is not correct and we’re not treated as liberators but as conquerors, and the Iraqis begin to resist particularly in Baghdad, do you think the American people are prepared for a long, costly and bloody battle with significant American casualties?”<sup>62</sup> Cheney dismissed Russert’s concerns, insisting the American BOG would be treated as liberators. Columnist Dan Radmacher wrote a year later, “Cheney’s ‘read’ we’re finding was way off. The Iraqis view American soldiers as occupiers, not liberators. The resistance is increasingly widespread. And the American people are facing a ‘long, costly, and bloody battle with significant American casualties.’”<sup>63</sup>

Columnist Fareed Zakaria captured the deteriorating conditions throughout Iraq in a piece written for *the Washington Post* in October 2006. The deteriorating state was not the result of failed military progress by the United States on the battlefield. The root cause of the increase in death and destruction was religion, but not between two distinct religions such as Christianity and Islam. The opposing sides in Iraq, as in the American Civil War, prayed to the same deity and claimed he was on their side. In 1860s America that deity was the Christian God, and in 2006 Iraq, it was the Muslim God, Allah. The seething divides between Sunni and Shiite that had long existed before the American

invasion were now let loose, and U.S. occupation forces were caught in the middle.<sup>64</sup>

Zakaria continued:

Iraq is in a civil war. Thirty thousand Iraqis have died there in the past three years, more than in many other conflicts widely recognized as civil wars. The number of internal refugees mostly Sunni victims of ethnic cleansing, has exploded over the past few months and exceeds a quarter of a million people. The attacks on Shiite mosques increase every week: There have been 69 such attacks since February, compared with 80 in the previous 2 ½ years.<sup>65</sup>

Seven years later, although the civil war has died down, the religious passions that inspired it have not, and very few American peacekeepers remain to quell a possible resurgence of violence. More troubling still, questions still circulate in official and unofficial circles regarding why American strategic leaders failed to adequately assess the religious flashpoints in Iraqi society before committing U.S. troops on the ground. Perhaps if they had thought about John Brown's inspiration for the Harpers Ferry Raid or Harriet Beecher Stowe's religiously-intoned novel that struck at the heart of the pre-Civil War North, they may have had insights to inform their decision-making.

In contrast to the struggles of the Iraq War, General Norman Schwarzkopf, as the CCDR at U.S. Central Command during the Gulf War in 1991, led the largest coalition since World War II with armed forces from 38 nations.<sup>66</sup> Schwarzkopf had a solid grasp of the role religion and history would play in maintaining the delicate balance of a Christian-Muslim coalition fighting to defeat a Muslim rogue state. Recognizing the need to avoid any appearance of subjugating the Arab/Islamic armed forces from the allied countries in the region, Schwarzkopf created a pseudo-parallel command structure that permitted the Arab/Islamic combatants to remain under the command of a Saudi Arabian general and all American forces to remain under General Schwarzkopf's command. This was a practical, religiously-sensitive solution to a potentially prickly

strategic problem, similar in approach to how Abraham Lincoln thought about emancipation and, later, conflict resolution in his Second Inaugural Address. In both cases, the President understood the salience of religion in executing—or communicating—a strategy, and used it tactfully and meaningfully. In Schwarzkopf’s case, his proper understanding of religious issues assisted his prosecution of a “unity of effort” vice “unity of command” theater strategy that ended in a resounding allied military victory.<sup>67</sup>

America’s anemic economic recovery, ballooning national deficit, and Congress’ reluctance to pass a “grand bargain” federal budget law has resulted in legislation by fiscal crisis. These constraints on means are occurring while America’s commitments and requests for stabilizing forces as the world’s sole superpower seem endless. The hegemony that existed after the fall of the Soviet Union is no longer economically sustainable. Given the current fiscal reality, the United States will likely have to lead as it did in the Gulf War or support multinational alliances or coalitions as was the case in Mali, with interagency and intergovernmental partners to respond to regional stability threats. The Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) and staff will therefore have an even more critical role in the design of future Theater Campaign Plans (TCP) that will necessitate a strong comprehension of the significance of history and religion. Getting it “right” culturally will likely become ever more important to strategists in an age when getting it wrong and trying to correct it with military might or remedial defense spending simply are not viable options.

In conclusion, opposing sides have long sought the favor of God and proclaimed that He was on their side to strengthen their argument. Religion has played a prominent

and distinct role in each of America's wars. Whether it was to pronounce the war as just, strengthen our resolve, or to justify lethal actions, religion filled one or all of these roles. The Civil War and current struggle Against Violent Muslim Extremists are, however, distinguished from the others for the pre-eminent role of religion in them.

The CCCR and staff have critical roles ensuring the design of the TCP is based on an accurate and thorough understanding of the operational environment. As it was in the Civil War, religion will continue to be significant in codifying our adversary's beliefs, values and will to fight in future wars. Using Albert Einstein's example, the CCCR's investment of time in thinking about the problem will yield greater dividends in the design of the operational approach within their AOR, and, ultimately, increase the chances of strategic success.

The United States military consistently demonstrates the "excellence of execution" during Phase 1, 2, and 3 of Operations. One could argue the overwhelming emphasis across Doctrine, Operations, Training, Material, Leadership and Education, Personnel and Facilities (DOTMLPF) is reserved for Phases 1, 2, 3. The United States military needs to become better at Phase 0 and 4, however, where the influences of history and religion are strongest and most problematic. Phase 0, Environmental Scanning, reveals that an assessment of the enemy's identity, interest, values, and culture are birthed in predominantly two areas: religion and history. In Phase 4 the enemy society is recovering from major armed conflict and most assuredly a tactical defeat at the hands of the world's lone superpower. At this stage, the society desperately and often violently struggles to regain the identity, interest, values, and culture it possessed prior to hostilities in Phase 0. The American strategic leadership



has generally failed to successfully understand, predict, and act upon the problems inherent in Phases 0 and 4 in some modern wars. Few would contest that getting the strategy wrong compounds an already VUCA environment, often resulting in more bloodshed among combatants and civilians. A renewed and enhanced emphasis on history and religion in an effort to garner an understanding of the adversary's identity, interest, values, and culture prior to hostilities will inform the strategy both before and after the conclusion of major combat operations during the transition to Phase 4. While Colonel Shaw focuses on the role of religion at the national security level, he recognizes the essential charge of the CCDR to understand religion at the point of engagement with the populous as he designs the TCP in his AOR. Shaw states, "Designing with religion in mind will help the combatant commanders better understand their actual environment, grasp the deep roots of complex problems, and create opportunities to provide enduring solutions."<sup>68</sup> No better summation of the value of both history and religion in modern operational design is possible, but a rewording of Joint Operational Doctrine Publication 5-0 that specifically addresses this value and offers guideposts for theater strategists is definitely in order. At a basic level, this change is absolutely essential to the preservation of America's most treasured asset, the men and women who voluntarily risk their lives in the nation's defense.

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